

HB 7192: An Act Concerning Municipal and Regional Opportunities and Efficiencies

To the Members of the Joint Committee on Planning and Development:

Thank you for allowing me to submit testimony on HB 7192.

As a longtime resident of Connecticut, and a parent of public school students, I strongly oppose HB 7192 and any other bill that opens the door to forced or coerced regionalization of Connecticut public schools. I am unequivocally opposed to establishing a study or pilot program on this topic.

I grew up in Danbury, CT, where I attended public schools, and eventually graduated from Danbury High. I left Connecticut to attend college and then moved to New York City for my career. My reason for moving back to Connecticut was for my children to attend the high quality local public school system. My husband and I considered communities across the NY metropolitan area, including Westchester, Long Island and Fairfield County. It's the existing public school system that keeps us here in New Canaan, and we are very concerned that legislators are looking to change the local success of our district and force school regionalization.

What are the desired outcomes of forcing regionalization? If the State of CT is looking for cost savings, then legislators should instead be focused on other areas to save money, such as reforming state pensions. Schools should not be considered an expense, but rather an investment in educating our precious children and their future. Additionally, it's a strong public school system that supports local property values, and attracts new families to towns. We should instead be focused on ensuring strong student performance and successful outcomes across the state. As an alternative, Hartford should be studying what makes Westport, New Canaan, Wilton, Darien, etc. top ranking public school districts.

Should HB7192 get passed (which I hope it does not), Section 7 proposes a Commission on Shared School Services which will consist of members appointed by the Governor and legislative leaders. The Governor should instead include appropriate individuals from the top 5 school districts in CT – a group whose representation is missing in this exercise -- to provide examples of what works well and how these towns have maximized such strong student performance and outcomes.

It's also evident that this bill is unfortunately silent regarding what will happen after the Commission completes its recommendations and proposals as outlined in Sections 8-10. Please ensure that any of these recommendations and proposals will not automatically be made into law. This would be completely unacceptable. I strongly believe that if this bill is passed, there will be continued angst during the almost two years that the Commission is working on their proposals. This will likely result in the ongoing exodus of both local residents and potential home buyers, and consequently in the continued drop of CT housing prices.

I strongly believe that legislators in Hartford should instead be focused on reforming state pensions, improving the state's economy, and finding new ways to attract new businesses to CT. Unfortunately, we are seeing huge outflows of residents and businesses, and our newly graduated college students are relocating elsewhere for jobs.

In closing, I hope you will oppose HB 7192 and any other legislation that opens the door to forced or coerced (aka incentivized) regionalization of Connecticut public schools.

Thank you again for allowing my testimony.

Best regards,
Lisa Carpenter
New Canaan, CT